

# NIH Graduate Partnerships Program Alumni

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## **Allison (Sylvetsky) Meni**

**The George Washington University  
Visiting Assistant Professor**

I am a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences at the George Washington University (GWU). I received my doctorate in Nutrition and Health Science from Emory University, as a student in the NIH Graduate Partnership Program. For my dissertation project, I studied the consumption trends, public perceptions, and metabolic effects of non-nutritive (artificial) sweeteners and was co-mentored by Dr. Miriam Vos in the Department of Pediatrics at Emory University School of Medicine and Dr. Kristina Rother in the Section on Pediatric Diabetes and Metabolism at intramural NIDDK. Following the completion of my graduate students, I continued to work with Dr. Rother as a post-doctoral IRTA with NIDDK before transitioning to my current position at GWU in February 2014. As a Visiting Assistant Professor, I teach several undergraduate and graduate level nutrition courses and have continued to conduct clinical research focused on elucidating the metabolic and health effects of artificial sweeteners.

## **Arjun Prasad**

**National Center for Biotechnology Information  
Genomic Database Developer**

I went to GWU and did my graduate research at the genome institute under Eric Green in comparative genomics and phylogenomics. I went on to a post-doc with Jim Mullikin (also at Genome) doing whole-genome shotgun assembly, annotation, and analysis. I recently started as a contractor with NCBI to help develop a pipeline to assist in the tracking of bacterial pathogen outbreaks using whole genome sequences.

## **Brad Holmes**

### **National Center for Biotechnology Information Staff Scientist**

I am a staff scientist with the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), a part of the National Library of Medicine. NCBI is responsible for many biological databases, including GenBank, RefSeq, PubMed and ClinVar, to name a few. I graduated from the University of Cambridge in 2010, as apart of the GPP-OxCam program. My thesis was on the role of RNase H1 in mitochondrial DNA replication and maintenance. At NCBI, I am the Variation Dataflow and Services group leader, and am working to redesign NCBI's archive of short genetic variation, dbSNP. I am also involved in making all of NCBI's variation data more easily available to the scientific and clinical communities. My work often involves bridging the great divide between the biological stakeholders who dream up new systems, and the computer engineers who make them a reality.

## **Candace Pfefferkorn**

### **U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Agency General Engineer/Project Manager**

I joined the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Agency (NRC) in 2014 as a General Engineer/Project Manager in the Division of Operating Reactor Licensing. Prior to joining the NRC, I completed a two-year AAAS science and technology policy fellowship at the Department of Energy (DOE) where I supported novel research and development of Concentrating Solar Power systems by developing funding opportunity announcements and serving as an active technical project manager. I have a Ph.D. in Chemical Physics and performed my thesis research in biophysics at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) through a partnership between the NIH and the University of Maryland, College Park. I received a B.S. in Physics and a B.A. in Music from Gettysburg College in 2006. I thrive in interdisciplinary environments and am excited to share my experience applying diverse technical and science policy skills in different contexts.

## **Derek Gildea**

**National Human Genome Research Institute  
Computational Biologist/Senior Scientific Programmer**

I attended the George Washington University with the chance to perform my dissertation research at the NIH through the Graduate Partnerships Program (GPP). My graduate research was done in the lab of Les Biesecker (NHGRI) where I led research to map, identify, and functionally characterize the gene mutated in a mouse model for a human developmental malformation syndrome. After I graduated, I joined and currently work in NHGRI's Bioinformatics and Scientific Programming Core where I help design computational applications for next-gen DNA sequencing analysis and advise NHGRI investigators on experimental design for projects that utilize next-gen sequencing.

## **Irene Avila**

**NIH Office for Scientific Workforce Diversity  
Special Assistant to the Deputy Chief**

I received my PhD from Arizona State University, Department of Psychology with a special emphasis on Behavioral Neuroscience. I completed my dissertation work in Dr. Judith R. Walters lab with NINDS. I am currently a Kelly Contractor and my position as a Scientific Program manager is in the Office of the Director, office of Scientific Workforce Diversity, working with the first permanently appointed Chief Officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity – Dr. Hannah Valantine.

## **John Simmons**

**National Cancer Institute/National Center for Advancing Translational Science  
Postdoctoral Fellow**

I am a translational cancer biologist and systems pharmacologist currently working as a postdoctoral fellow between NCI and NCATS. I received my undergraduate degree in Biology from American University, and worked as a post-baccalaureate fellow in NCI after completing my degree. I went on to join the Georgetown University-NIH Graduate Partnership Program and the lab of Dr. Beverly Mock (NCI), and in April received my PhD in Tumor Biology. During my dissertation work, I focused on developing systems-level

approaches to evaluate the molecular mechanisms of drug synergy. While a graduate student, I participated in a translational science training program offered by OITE, which led to my current collaboration with Dr. Craig Thomas and the Chemical Genomics group at NCATS. Building on preliminary data generated in this “side project” collaboration, I successfully competed for research funding from the Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation, becoming an MMRF Fellow in November.

## **Kara Brink**

**Booz Allen Hamilton**  
**Associate**

I was part of the NIH- Karolinska Institutet and worked in NIMH. I currently work as an Associate at Booz Allen Hamilton; member of the Brain and Behavior Team focused on supporting the development clinical guidance and research on Traumatic Brain Injury and Psychological Health topics.

## **Rayna Carter**

**Office of Intramural Training and Education**  
**Director of Student Service, Undergraduate Scholarship Program**

I graduated from the Brown University-NIH GPP in 2013 with a Ph.D. in Neuroscience. Directly after completing my Ph.D., I became a member of the NIH Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE). I am currently the Director of Student Services for the NIH Undergraduate Scholarship Program (UGSP). I help to manage the recruitment, interviewing, and research group placement of scholars and ensures that the administrative actions of the program are organized and running efficiently. I also mentor and provide resources to UGSP scholars and other NIH trainees as a member of the OITE team.

## **Rose-Marie Karlsson**

### **National Institutes for Mental Health Postdoctoral Fellow**

I graduated from the Karolinska Institutet in 2009 with a Ph.D. in Neuroscience. I performed my dissertation research in the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. After graduating, I did a postdoc at Johns Hopkins University from 2009-2012. I am currently doing a second postdoc in the National Institutes of Mental Health.

## **Tamara James**

### **American Association for the Advancement of Science Science and Technology Policy Fellow**

I am a science and technology policy fellow with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research in the Office of Science Policy and Analysis. In my role as an AAAS policy fellow, I assist with many functions including scientific planning and priority setting, policy research development, and coordination. Previously, I was a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the NIH Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). At NICHD I worked with Dr. Mike Cashel in the Program in Genomics of Differentiation. I studied the bacterial response to environmental and nutritional stress with a specific focus on stress response regulator proteins and their potential role in anti-infective developments. I received my Doctor of Philosophy in Biomedical Sciences from New York University School of Medicine in 2013. My degree was awarded in collaboration with the National Institutes of Health Graduate Partnership Program. My dissertation research focused prokaryotic transcription and the highly conserved enzyme, RNA Polymerase (RNAP). Through this work I used molecular biological and computational methods to determine mechanism impairment in a bacterial virus infection.

## **Tracy Laabs**

**Strategic Analysis, Inc.**

**Senior Scientist/Team Lead**

I am a Senior Scientist and the Life Sciences Team Lead with Strategic Analysis, Inc. (SA) where I provide technical expertise and program management support for the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), Defense Sciences Office (DSO). I support a number of DSO programs involving neuroscience, molecular biology, regenerative medicine and human performance. I work in a collaborative environment with interagency partners, academics and operational military units. I have also served as a Technical Reviewer for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency Joint Science and Technology Office for Chemical and Biological Defense. Prior to joining SA, I was an NIH Intramural Fellow undertaking a collaborative PhD between the University of Cambridge, UK and the National Institutes of Health. As a graduate fellow, my research focused on enhancing central nervous system regeneration following traumatic brain injury and spinal cord injury.